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**HUDSON BAY TO  
THE BLACKFOOT COUNTRY**

JOURNALS OF HENDRY AND COCKING

By

LAWRENCE J. BURPEE

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## HUDSON BAY TO THE BLACKFOOT COUNTRY

ANTHONY HENDRY AND MATTHEW COCKING

ANTHONY HENDRY was born in the Isle of Wight. Nothing is known of his early years, beyond the one fact that, in 1748, he was outlawed for smuggling. Two years later he entered the service of the Hudson's Bay Company, the directors not knowing that he was under sentence of outlawry.

He was sent out to York Factory, on Hudson Bay. Andrew Graham, one of the Company's officers, who knew Hendry at York Factory, says that he was bold, enterprising and honest. The first two qualities are not at all inconsistent with the character of a smuggler; the last may seem to be, but is not always. Smuggling in Hendry's day was often looked upon as a perfectly legitimate occupation. If it had not the sanction of law, it had that of custom, and it was no unusual circumstance for a whole countryside to sympathize with and support the smuggler as against the exciseman. At any rate, Hendry, smuggler and outlaw though

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he may have been, was to prove himself a man of courage and resourcefulness; one who could be depended upon to carry out the task entrusted to him in spite of danger, discomfort and discouragement.

In 1754 Hendry was chosen by the Chief Factor at York Factory to lead an expedition into the interior, partly to explore the country, and partly to induce some of the remote tribes to bring their furs down to York Factory to trade. Before following him on this very important journey, it may be worth while to glance for a moment at this famous trading post, as it was in Hendry's day. From his contemporary, Andrew Graham, we learn that it stood on the north bank of Hayes river, three miles from its mouth, on what was practically a peninsula lying between Hayes and Nelson rivers. The fort was built of logs, with bastions at each of its four corners, and was surrounded by a palisade strong enough to keep out Indians. Inside were quarters for the officers and men of the Hudson's Bay Company, store-rooms, a blacksmith shop, and other buildings. On the bank of the river, in front of the fort, was a half-moon battery,

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AN INDIAN BUFFALO HUNT ON THE PRAIRIES

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built of turf and earth, mounted with fifteen cannon, nine-pounders. Two miles below the fort, on the same side, was another battery of ten guns, twelve-pounders. These two batteries commanded the approach to the fort from the sea, but, as Graham dryly remarks, "the shoals and sand-banks across the mouth defend us more."

Hayes river, up which Hendry travelled, was for many years the principal route from Hudson Bay to Lake Winnipeg and the Saskatchewan. One might suppose, looking at the map, that Nelson river would be the natural way to travel, as it is a much larger stream than the Hayes, but the Nelson is extremely difficult and dangerous, its current being very swift and broken by many rapids. Consequently the fur-traders and other early travellers used the Hayes route, which took them to Knee lake and Oxford lake, thence by small waterways and the Echimamish river to Playgreen lake and Lake Winnipeg. But this was some time after Hendry's day. He started up the Hayes, and then turned to the right through a series of rivers and lakes, of which little is known even at the present time, to Cross

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lake on the upper waters of the Nelson. From here he paddled west through other lakes and rivers, north of Lake Winnipeg, until he finally reached the Saskatchewan a few miles above Cedar lake.

Making his way up this great river of the plains, he came to a place, now known as The Pas, where the famous French explorer La Vérendrye had built a trading post some years before. The fort was now commanded by Saint-Luc de la Corne, who, however, was absent.

"On our arrival," says Hendry, "two Frenchmen came to the waterside, and in a very genteel manner invited me into their house, which I readily accepted." They told him that La Corne and most of his men had gone down to Montreal with the season's furs. Hendry presented the French with two feet of tobacco, and they returned the courtesy with a present of venison. The tobacco of the fur trade was of two kinds, known as Brazil tobacco and white tobacco, the former used by the Hudson's Bay Company and the latter by the French traders. Brazil tobacco was made in long ropes, of which one, two or more feet were cut off as

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required. It was stronger than the tobacco used by the French.

Having taken leave of the French, Hendry continued his way up the Saskatchewan for a few miles, and then ascended Carrot river, on the south side, until he could go no farther. He then abandoned his canoes and travelled overland toward the south-west, crossing the South Saskatchewan a few miles north of the present city of Saskatoon, and continuing west until he reached the banks of the North Saskatchewan at what is now known as the Elbow, about midway between Prince Albert and Battleford.

Hendry did not cross the North Saskatchewan, but travelled west along its banks, crossed Battle river and some weeks later reached the Red Deer. Three days after crossing the Red Deer he arrived at a large camp of the Blackfoot Indians, with whom or in whose country, in what is now the Province of Alberta, he spent the winter. As this is the first known visit of white men to the Blackfeet, what Hendry has to say of their manners and customs is unusually interesting. It is particularly worth noting



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that, although the later history of the Blackfeet was marked by fierce hostility to the whites, they treated Hendry with the utmost friendliness and generosity. One cannot help thinking that their later antipathy was brought about by the fact that unscrupulous traders took advantage of the ignorance of these Indians to cheat and ill-use them. It is not a pleasant thing to have to admit, but the history of the relations of our own race with the Red Man is often humiliating to our self-respect. Nearly always the native has at first received the white stranger with friendliness, if not with the awe due to a superior being; and time and again his confidence has been so shamelessly betrayed that he has been transformed from a friend into a bitter enemy.

Here is Hendry's account of his meeting with the Blackfeet, or Archithinue, as he calls them:

"Then came to us four men on horseback. They told us they were sent from the main body to see whether we were friends or enemies. We told them we were friends. We came to two hundred tents of Archithinue natives, pitched in two rows with an

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opening in the middle. We were conducted to the tent of the chief which was at one end, large enough to contain fifty persons. He received us on a white buffalo skin, attended by twenty elderly men. [White buffalo skins were very rare and were highly prized by the Indians].

"He made signs for me to sit down on his right hand, which I did. Pipes were brought out and smoked all round, according to their usual custom. Not a word was yet spoken on either side. Smoking being over, boiled buffalo flesh was served round in baskets, and I was presented with ten buffalo tongues.

"My interpreter informed the chief that I was sent by the Great Leader who lives down at the great waters to invite his young men to come down and see him and bring with them beaver skins and wolves' skins, and they would get in return powder and shot and guns, cloth and beads and other things. He made little answer; only said that it was a long way off and that his people knew not the use of the canoe."

The following day Hendry had another interview, through an interpreter, with the

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Chief of the Blackfeet, and again urged him to allow some of his young men to go down to York Factory, where they would be very kindly received and would be supplied with guns and other valuable things made by the white people.

The Chief, who was shrewd and far-sighted, replied that it was a very long journey, that his people were accustomed to travel on horseback and knew nothing about travelling by water. He could not see any wisdom in the Blackfeet abandoning the horses they understood to travel in canoes that were unfamiliar to them, or to abandon the buffalo meat, which they could get in abundance, for fish which they had never been accustomed to eat. Why, he said, should his young men make a long and laborious journey to the sea, and perhaps be starved on the way, merely to obtain guns which they do not need. "They follow the buffalo," said he, "and kill them without difficulty with their bows and arrows, and they never want for food." "Such remarks," said the candid Hendry, "I thought exceedingly true."

This Blackfoot philosopher reminds one

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of the reply made by a Mandan chief on a similar occasion. "White people do not know how to live," he said. "They leave their houses in small parties, they risk their lives on the great waters, among strange nations who often take them for enemies. What is the use of beaver skins? Do they make gunpowder of them? Do they preserve them from sickness? Do they serve them beyond the grave?" "We are no slaves!" he continued. "Our fathers were not slaves. In my young days there were no white people, and we knew no wants. We were successful in war; our arrows were mortal; our villages rejoiced when the men returned from war, for of the scalps of our enemies they brought many. The white people came; they brought with them some good things; but they also brought the small-pox; and they brought evil liquors. The Indians since diminished and they are no longer happy."

One interesting point is brought out in Hendry's narrative, and that is that in the middle of the eighteenth century the Black-feet not only had horses, but evidently had been accustomed to them for some time.

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This was indeed the first tribe with which the Hudson's Bay Company had come into contact, that travelled on horseback. So much was this the case, that the officers of the company were inclined to discredit Hendry's entire narrative because he reported the use of the horse by the Blackfeet. The fact seems to be that, after the introduction of horses into Mexico by the Spaniards, many of them became wild and wandered up into the plains of the southwest. The Indians learned their use probably from the Spaniards, and the practice gradually spread north, on both sides of the Rockies, until it reached the Blackfeet, and from them the Cree and other more easterly tribes learned to use the horse both in peace and war.

Hendry says that the Blackfeet knew how to hobble their horses when they turned them out to feed. They used hair halters with buffalo skin pads and stirrups made of the same material. He remarks that the Blackfeet were very good horsemen.

Hendry also tells us that the Blackfeet did not like his tobacco, which they found too strong. Like many of the other tribes,

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they grew a tobacco of their own which was much milder. Later they learned to mix a little of the white man's tobacco with their own, perhaps to give it more flavour. Alexander Henry, a fur trader who travelled through the west some years after Hendry, states that the Indians of the plains used the blossoms of their tobacco plant until the leaves had arrived at maturity. They dried the blossoms before the fire on a fragment of an earthen pot. He found the flowers a very poor substitute for his own tobacco—"a nauseous, insipid weed." The ripe leaf was somewhat better, but even that was mere trash, possessed of neither strength nor virtue.

Hendry also gives one of the earliest accounts of hunting buffalo on the prairies of what is now western Canada. The Blackfeet were so expert that with one or two arrows they could follow and kill a buffalo at will. "As for me," he says, "I had sufficient employ to manage my horse." He tells us that the creeks were full of beaver which the Indians trapped and the women dressed for clothing. The country was alive with moose, deer and other game, large and

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small, and neither red man nor white had any difficulty in securing food.

During the winter one of Hendry's men had a narrow escape from a grizzly bear. He had attacked the animal and wounded it, but only enough to enrage it. The bear rushed upon the Indian, who adopted an expedient familiar to the natives under such circumstances. He tore off his beaver coat and threw it at the bear, and, while the latter was tearing the coat to pieces, managed to make his escape.

Hendry spent the winter travelling about the Blackfoot country, somewhere between the present cities of Calgary and Edmonton, hunting and trapping, and occasionally coming into contact with parties of Indians, with whom his relations seem to have been uniformly friendly.

Although the weather was cold, Hendry says that up to the end of January he had worn nothing on his feet but a thin flannel sock and a buffalo skin shoe or moccasin, with the hair inside. He seems to have had a rather merry time, as one repeatedly finds such entries in the journal as these: "At night we had a grand feast with drum-

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ming, dancing, etc.;" and again, "Feasting, dancing, drumming and conjuring." As the winter wore on and the snow became deeper, the squaws were employed in making snowshoes. Hendry and his companions travelled over the top of the snow to visit their traps and hunt buffalo and moose. "It was," says Hendry, "a pleasant and plentiful country." It would appear that occasionally the explorer had more "feasting, dancing, etc.," than was good for him, as he puts this note in his diary: "Myself hath been out of order with a Head-ack."

Late in March they began to prepare for the homeward journey, the old men building canoes and the young men hunting. Hendry was now in the country of the Assiniboine Indians, where he witnessed one of the ceremonial dog feasts common to that and other tribes of the plains. He noticed that the Indians did not skin the animal, but scraped it and roasted it over a fire. The dog feast was in the nature of a religious ceremony, and no women were permitted to be present, or to take part in the feast.

The twenty-third of April Hendry displayed his flag in honour of St. George, and



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the Indians did likewise after he had explained the reason for the ceremony. That afternoon the ice in the river broke up, and great numbers of geese and swan were seen flying to the north. The explorer's entry under date of April 27 is brief but poignant; "Musketoes plenty and sting without mercy."

The following day Hendry started on his long journey to Hudson Bay. It is not altogether clear from his narrative what route he followed, the North or the South Saskatchewan, but the probabilities seem to point to the latter. It would appear that, on April 28, he was somewhere on the upper waters of the Red Deer river, and that he travelled by canoe down that stream to where it empties into the South Saskatchewan, then down the South Saskatchewan to the Forks, and by way of the main stream and the route followed on his outward journey, to York Factory.

A little below the Forks Hendry stopped at a French trading post, which seems to have been an outpost of the one he had visited the previous year. The officer in charge invited him to supper, and told him

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that they had heard of his expedition. Incidentally this cunning Frenchman managed to fill Hendry's Indians with brandy and get from them the pick of their furs, much to the Englishman's chagrin.

Hendry also visited Fort Pasquia, where he was received by La Corne, who had returned from Montreal. "He is dressed very genteel," says Hendry, "but the men wear nothing but thin drawers and striped cotton shirts ruffled at the hands and breast." May must have been quite warm on the Saskatchewan that year. Here again Hendry's Indians traded many of their best furs for French brandy.

Hendry was much impressed with the light canoes used by the French. "Their birch-rind canoes," he says, "will carry as much as an India ship's long-boat, and draw little water; and so light that two men can carry one several miles with ease; they can sail them before the wind but not else." The explorer's last entry is: "On the twentieth day of this month of June we arrived at the fort (York Factory), where we were kindly received."

The journey of Anthony Hendry is

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important because it records the first expedition sent inland by the Hudson's Bay Company to explore the interior country, the vast region that now makes up the Provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. Hendry was not the original discoverer of the Saskatchewan, which had been visited by Henry Kelsey and by La Vérendrye some years before his journey, but it is at least certain that Hendry was the first white man to visit and describe the Blackfeet, and so far as one knows he was the first to explore the upper waters of the Saskatchewan, as well as some of its tributaries, such as the Red Deer.

### BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

The original Journal of Anthony Hendry is preserved in the Archives of the Hudson's Bay Company in London. A manuscript copy is in the Public Archives of Canada at Ottawa. The Journal was published, with an introduction and notes, by Lawrence J. Burpee, in the *Transactions* of the Royal Society of Canada, 1907; and republished in volume 2 of *Fur Traders of the West*.

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### MATTHEW COCKING

Nearly twenty years after the return of Hendry from the Blackfoot country, the Hudson's Bay Company sent out another explorer to visit the same tribe. Of Matthew Cocking even less is known than of Anthony Hendry, up to the time of the expedition inland in 1772-3.

Cocking's route inland from York Factory to the Saskatchewan was practically the same as that followed by Hendry. Instead, however, of ascending Carrot river, as Hendry had done, he continued up the Saskatchewan almost to the Forks, and then travelled overland toward the southwest.

In the interval since Hendry's visit Canada had been ceded by France to England, and the French traders had been withdrawn from the west. Cocking mentions the old trading post of La Vérendrye, Fort Posskoyac, at The Pas, but it had long since been abandoned. He also notes two other old trading posts of the French, before he comes to the Forks. Some distance above Saskatchewan lake, which then bore the formidable

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Indian name of Manemeshahsquatanan Sakahegan, meaning "There the Red Willow Grows," Cocking passed another old trading post, which had been occupied by James Finlay about five years before. Finlay was one of the first of the British fur traders who went west from Montreal after the conquest of Quebec.

After leaving the main Saskatchewan, Cocking crossed the South Branch, and struck across toward the elbow of the North Saskatchewan, pretty much on Hendry's old trail. He followed the North Saskatchewan to the Eagle Hills, and then travelled out into the plains, following an erratic course, and constantly looking out for indications of the Blackfeet.

They were now in the heart of the buffalo country, and immense herds were seen on every side. Cocking describes what was then a popular means of hunting the buffalo. The Indians made a great circular pound by means of fallen trees at the foot of a small hill, with an entrance on the hillside. From this entrance lines of small sticks extended out for about a mile and a half in the form of a great funnel. Into this entrance the

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buffalo were driven, and as they were too frightened to break through the slight fence, they were gradually forced down the funnel and into the pound, around which the Indians were stationed, who shot them down with bows and arrows.

A few days later two scouts of the Blackfeet visited Cocking's camp. The explorer persuaded them that he and his Cree followers were friends, and sent a present of tobacco to the tribe, which he was very anxious to meet. He calls them the Equestrian natives, and says they are, from what he has heard, "certainly a brave people and far superior to any tribes that visit our forts; they have dealings with no Europeans, but live in a state of nature." It was their custom to travel up from the south-east each summer to meet the Crees, with whom they traded.

The Blackfoot scouts rode away promising to bring the tribe back with them, and a few days later a number of them arrived and pitched their tents a short distance from Cocking's camp.

Cocking's description of his meeting with the Blackfeet is very instructive, and, in

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connection with the information already given in Hendry's Journal, affords us a very good idea of the character of these Indians, as well as their manners and customs at the time when white men first came among them. "In all their actions," says Cocking, "they far excel the other natives. They are all well mounted on light, sprightly animals; their weapons, bows and arrows. Several have on jackets of moose leather, sixfold, quilted, and without sleeves, to defend them against the arrows of their adversaries. They likewise used pack-horses, which give their women a great advantage over the women (of other tribes) who are either carrying or hauling on sledges every day in the year. They appear to me more like Europeans than Americans." By "Americans" Cocking means Indians.

The traveller praises the hospitality of the Blackfeet. They were continually inviting him to partake of their best fare, generally berries stewed in water with fat, which he found very agreeable eating. Their principal food, however, was flesh of the buffalo, and Cocking notes that they were more

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cleanly, both in their clothing and in the mode of preparing their food, than the other tribes. They used earthen pots for cooking, much like the pots with which he had been familiar in England, but without feet. They made fire by using moss as tinder. They had their own native tobacco, which entered into all their religious and other ceremonies. Their peculiar manner of showing respect to a stranger was by holding his pipe while he smoked. Tobacco was used only by the men. Cocking says he never saw a woman smoking a pipe. The Blackfeet had among them many slaves, whom they used with remarkable kindness. It was the custom to adopt them into families of those who had lost their children either by war or sickness.

It was now the middle of January. Cocking took leave of the Blackfeet and started toward the east. He was not without anxiety, as the ammunition was running low and it was very necessary to obtain a supply of meat for the long journey back to York Factory. A few days later he notes that his party is hard pinched for want of food. He is struck with the fact that the Indians suffer hunger with surprising patience. To add to



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his difficulties several of his horses died from starvation and the severe cold.

Early in April they were back on the Saskatchewan, building canoes and waiting for the ice to break up. Frogs were croaking, and among other less welcome signs of spring the explorer mentions that "mosquitoes are plentiful and troublesome." Buffalo were now found in abundance and an ample supply of provisions was secured.

On May 20 Cocking arrived at a trading post on the Saskatchewan maintained by some of the Canadian traders from Montreal. It is curious to find him complaining of the way in which these Montreal traders outbid him, and secured all the choicest furs. It will be remembered that Hendry had the same experience about twenty years before, but in that case the rivalry was between French and British traders; now it was between rival British traders from Montreal and Hudson Bay respectively. This was the beginning of the long contest between the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company, which only ended with the union of the two companies in 1821.

Cocking's description of the fort of the

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Montreal traders may be compared with Hendry's account of the French post. It was a long square building built of logs, half of it used as a kitchen, the other as a trading room and bedroom, with a loft above for the storage of the furs. There were also three small log houses where the men slept; and the whole was enclosed with a ten-foot stockade.

It is interesting to learn what was given in exchange for furs in these early days. One Indian gave four wolf skins for a tomahawk; another traded a beaver skin for a small tin breakfast plate; and a third exchanged a beaver skin for half a yard of worsted lace. But liquor was then, as for many years afterward, the most popular article of trade with the Indians. Cocking mentions that the Montreal trader obtained a hundred beaver skins in exchange for four gallons of rum mixed with water.

From the point of view of exploration, this journey of Matthew Cocking adds little to what had already been achieved by Anthony Hendry, but the two journeys taken together are very important as among the earliest attempts to explore the country

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west of Hudson Bay, that wonderfully rich prairie land that now constitutes the three provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. Hendry and Cocking never dreamed that a century and a half later this country, over which in their day the buffalo roamed in countless numbers, and which was inhabited only by tribes of wandering Indians, would be the home of two million Canadians, and would produce annually hundreds of millions of bushels of grain.

As a result of this expedition of Cocking's he was sent inland again in 1774, with Samuel Hearne, the famous explorer, to build Cumberland House on the Saskatchewan. The Hudson's Bay Company professed to despise fur traders from Montreal, whom they contemptuously referred to as "peddlers." They were too shrewd, however, to ignore the strength of their competition, and from that time forward they followed the policy of building trading posts in the interior wherever they came into competition with the Montreal traders.

When Alexander Henry visited Cumberland House, in 1775, he found it "garrisoned by Highlanders from the Orkney

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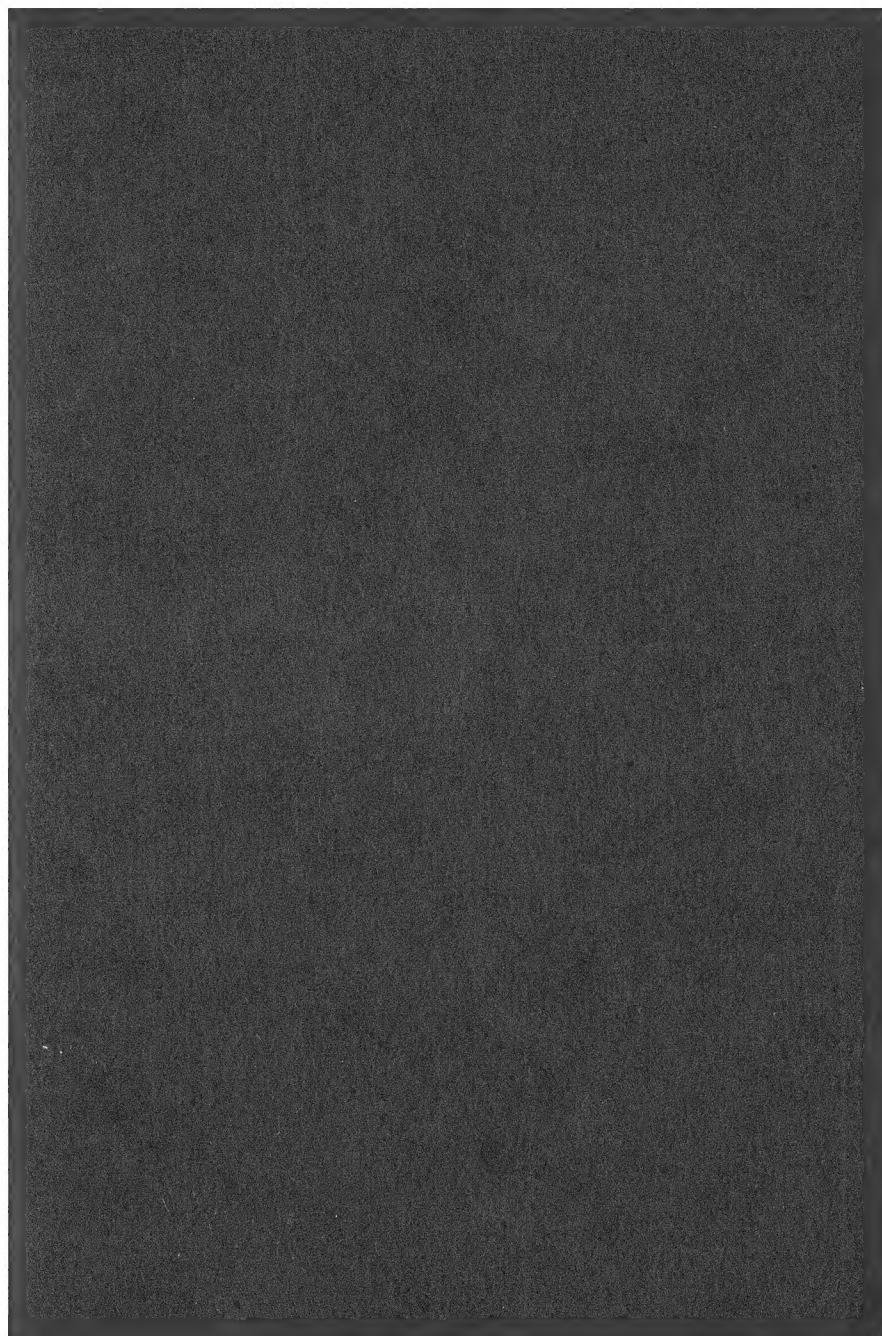
Islands and under the command of a Mr. Cocking, by whom, though unwelcome guests, we were treated with much civility." Two years later Cocking was in charge of Fort Severn, one of the posts of the Hudson's Bay Company at the mouth of the Severn River on Hudson Bay. He remained there until 1781. Nothing more is known of him beyond the fact that he died a few years afterward.

### BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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